

Safeguarding update:

### **Twice as many young people seeking help with eating disorders**

The eating disorder charity BEAT has told *Sky News* that the number of university-aged young people needing its support in the UK has more than doubled in recent years - with the charity delivering 15,120 helpline sessions in 2023/24, up from 6,620 in 2019/20. Tom Quinn from the charity said that with the move to university often being "a time of anxiety" for young people "when they are under pressure for a new way of working and studying", some people "are developing an eating disorder for the first time", while for others "that eating disorder is getting worse because they don't have their families around". The charity has urged the Government to "make sure there is enough treatment available" to be sure that people can "get the help they need".

*Sky News*

### **Emergency funding needed as investigations into at-risk children rise**

The Local Government Association has urged Chancellor Rachel Reeves to intervene in the face of a funding crisis in children's social care - after the number of "Section 47" investigations, launched in response to reasonable suspicions that a child is suffering or likely to suffer serious harm, reached a record 225,400 last year, with costs rising 11% in a single year as a result. Councils are now launching an average of 618 such investigations a day, up 77% over the last decade. Cllr Arooj Shah, chair of the LGA's children and young people board, said it is "deeply saddening when any child experiences suffering, and it is absolutely right that councils act where there are concerns", adding that the "disturbingly high figures show the huge pressures councils are under to intervene and provide that vital care and support". Councils, she said, "are calling on the Chancellor in the Autumn Budget to provide an emergency cash injection for children's social care to help councils continue to provide this lifeline of support for vulnerable children".

*Sky News* *Evening Standard* *The Independent*

### **Government urged to act on spice vapes**

Wera Hobhouse, MP for Bath, has called for legislative changes to combat the alarming trend of children purchasing drug-laced vapes online. In a Commons debate, she highlighted that 16.6% of vapes tested in schools contained the synthetic cannabis spice, often referred to as the "Zombie Drug." Hobhouse said: "Gone are the days when you needed to meet a sketchy person in a back alley to get hold of illegal drugs," as she highlighted the ease of access through platforms like Snapchat and Telegram. Policing minister Dame Diana Johnson acknowledged the existing illegality of spice-laced vapes but admitted that "further restrictions are needed" to address youth vaping. The Liberal Democrats are aiming to revive the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which includes measures to regulate online sales and enhance oversight of digital platforms. Professor Chris Pudney from the University of Bath

warned of the severe health risks: "We know children can have cardiac arrests when they smoke spice."

*Express.co.uk*

### **Teen brains struggle with smartphones addiction**

Scientists have found that teenagers are more vulnerable to smartphone addiction due to their developing brains. MRI scans featured in ITV's *Tonight* programme illustrate how the brain responds to enjoyable activities like social media browsing. According to Ciara McCabe, a professor of Neuroscience and Mental Health at the University of Reading: "Adolescent brains or teenage brains respond differently and in particular to rewarding experiences than the adult brain." This difference in brain development leads to a lack of control over smartphone use. John Wallis Academy in Kent has already seen a 40% drop in detentions since implementing a smartphone ban, with headteacher Damien McBeath noting: "Reports of online bullying are at a five-year low." Almudena Lara from Ofcom highlighted the risks of children accessing harmful content, stating: "It's very easy for children to access harmful content."

*Daily Mirror*

### **Vaping rates soar among students**

Recent data from NHS England reveals that a quarter of pupils aged 11 to 15 have tried vaping, with nearly 10% using e-cigarettes regularly. Matt Fagg, NHS England's director for long-term conditions, expressed concern: "It is incredibly concerning that almost one in 10 young people regularly or occasionally vape." The Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People report indicates that 89% of those who vape have never smoked tobacco. Charities are urging the Government to expedite the Tobacco and Vapes Bill to regulate e-cigarette use more effectively. Health minister Andrew Gwynne highlighted the need to protect children from nicotine addiction, claiming: "The health advice is clear that children and adult non-smokers should never vape." The report also noted that cigarette use among this age group remains stable, with 11% having tried smoking.

*Daily Mirror*

### **Ban on disposable vapes coming in June**

Circular Economy Minister Mary Creagh has confirmed that the sale of disposable vapes will be banned in England from next June as part of a wider review of vaping and smoking laws. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has estimated that almost 5m single-use vapes were littered or discarded every week last year. Ms Creagh said disposable vapes, which have helped drive a sharp rise in youth vaping, are "extremely wasteful and blight our towns and cities", with the ban representing "the first step on the road to a circular economy, where we use resources for longer, reduce waste, accelerate the path to net-zero and create thousands of jobs across the country". Elsewhere, the Government is understood to be reconsidering plans to expand a ban on smoking in public spaces to pub and restaurant gardens, although smoking is still expected to be banned in playgrounds and outside schools and hospitals.

*BBC News The Guardian The Times*

## **Snapchat tops child grooming cases**

According to the NSPCC, Snapchat is the most prevalent platform in child grooming cases, involved in 48% of recorded incidents. The charity analysed data from 45 police forces, revealing 7,000 offences of "sexual communication with a child" in 2023-24, with Snapchat linked to 875 cases. Jess Phillips, the minister for safeguarding, said: "Social media companies have a responsibility to stop this vile abuse from happening." The NSPCC is calling on Ofcom to enhance regulations under the Online Safety Act to better protect children. Sir Peter Wanless, chief executive of the NSPCC, emphasised the need for tech companies to ensure their platforms are safe for children, adding: "One year since the Online Safety Act became law and we are still waiting for tech companies to make their platforms safe for children." Snapchat has expressed a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and takes action against offenders.

*The Times*